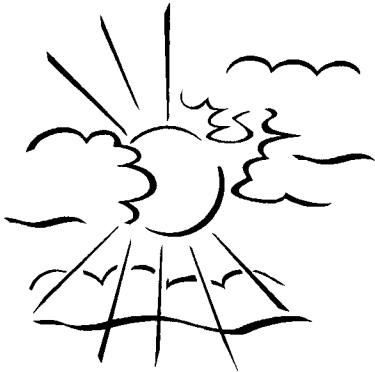


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Wednesday, March 29, 2006

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Leash on Ricky, mom's comments troubled principal

March 29, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

MASON -- The first time Frost Elementary School's principal saw Ricky Holland was memorable, he testified Tuesday morning, because the boy's mother was leading him into the school by a leash.

"She told me he was not a good kid, that he was going to be a lot of trouble," Randall Cook said of Ricky's mother, Lisa Holland.

The second-grader passively stood by, linked to his mother on the tether, as she told the principal of the Jackson school that the teachers were "not going to enjoy him being in school, and he was going to be a big challenge to us," Cook said during an ongoing preliminary examination in 55th District Court in Mason.

Holland, 33, and her husband, Tim Holland, 37, are charged with murder in the 7-year-old boy's death and first-degree child abuse for allegedly mentally and physically abusing Ricky for more than four years.

The hearing, which began Feb. 28, will mark its 12th day today. Ingham County Assistant Prosecutor Mike Ferency is trying to establish a pattern of abusive behavior, seen by some in the Jackson Public School District but not by others.

Cook said he never reported any suspected abuse to Child Protective Services, but because of the leash and Lisa Holland's negative comments, he paid special attention to Ricky.

Cook said that during the two weeks that Ricky was enrolled at his school, he spoke to the boy several times in school and on the playground, and even tossed a football with him because he was not playing with other children.

In response to questions by Lisa Holland's attorney, Andrew Abood, Cook said that Ricky never said anything about being abused at home or not getting enough to eat.

On Sept. 2, 2004, Cook testified, Lisa and Tim Holland met with officials at Frost to discuss whether Ricky needed any extra help. During that meeting, Lisa Holland made more negative comments about her son, Cook said.

He said she asked that the school not provide Ricky with any treats or other special items children may get in the classroom because of Ricky's bad behavior at home.

Cook testified that he told her that, "We need to look at positive things about Ricky, and that's what Frost school was going to do. ...We were not going to sanction him for something that happened at home."

After the meeting, Cook said, Lisa Holland removed Ricky from Frost, saying she would homeschool her son.

The Hollands moved to Leroy Township near Williamston the following May, and Ricky's parents reported that he had run away from home on July 2.

On Jan. 27, Tim Holland led police to the boy's skeletal remains several miles south of their home. Lisa and Tim Holland accuse each other in Ricky's death.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

Principal: Mom leashed Ricky, sought special limits She testifies mother pulled boy, 7, from school in Jackson after her demands were refused.

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

Wednesday, March 29, 2006

MASON -- Lisa Holland, accused along with her husband of killing their 7-year-old adopted son, Ricky, withdrew the child from school after the principal refused to bow to her demand that he be denied birthday treats and other special school events.

Randall Cook, principal at Frost Elementary in Jackson, where the Hollands lived before moving to Williamston, further testified Tuesday that Lisa Holland shocked him by having Ricky on a leash when she brought him to school to enroll him in the second grade, in September of 2004. "The conversation from Lisa was very negative," Cook said. "She informed me he was not a good student and he was going to be a real problem. I said hello to Ricky and welcomed him to the school and said we were glad to have him."

Cook described Lisa as "defensive" and said Tim Holland -- while present -- did not participate in a second meeting at Frost.

When Lisa Holland told him she wanted to deprive Ricky of classroom treats, "I laid down the policy ... that Ricky would be provided access to treats or any special activities enjoyed by the class," Cook said.

"I was not going to allow a parent to direct that he would not be able to participate in a treat or an activity because of something that happened at home."

A week later, the principal learned that the Hollands had withdrawn Ricky from school to home-school him -- and Cook found that "worrisome" because "there's very little monitoring."

The Hollands moved to Williamston, east of Lansing, the next spring. They reported Ricky missing July 2, and said he had run away.

Tim Holland led authorities to Ricky's body in a rural area in January.

Both parents have accused the other of murdering Ricky. While the exact cause of death was not determined, authorities said the child had broken bones.

Testimony in the Hollands' preliminary hearing continues today.

You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or kbouffard@detnews.com.

Principal says mom led Ricky on tether Educator never saw device used on a child before

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

Published March 29, 2006

MASON - When Lisa Holland showed up at a Jackson elementary school in August 2004 to enroll her son Ricky, she was leading the boy with a leashlike tether, Principal Randall Cook testified Tuesday.

When asked if he had ever seen such a device used on a child, the 25-year veteran educator said, "In my years of experience, it has never occurred."

Cook's testimony came on the 11th day of testimony in Tim and Lisa Holland's preliminary hearing in 55th District Court in Mason. The hearing will determine if the murder case against the Hollands advances to trial.

The Hollands, who have accused each other of killing Ricky, also are charged with first-degree child abuse.

Prosecutors are seeking to establish a pattern of abuse against Ricky.

Despite the use of the tether, Cook told defense attorneys he did not suspect or report abuse to state officials during the two-week period Ricky attended second grade at Frost Elementary School.

But he did take special notice of Ricky, Cook said.

The principal also testified Lisa Holland dwelled on Ricky's negative behavior, and that at a meeting with school officials in early September 2004, she said not to give him treats.

When Cook refused, Lisa Holland became defensive.

About a week later, Ricky was removed from the school to be home-schooled, he said.

Under questioning from Tim Holland's co-counsel Scott Mertens, Cook admitted that when he talked to police in July 2005 - after Ricky was reported missing - he told them he did not suspect physical abuse.

He noted, however, that he told police the relationship between Lisa Holland and Ricky was "an unusual situation."

Cook said Tim Holland was at the September meeting with Jackson school officials, but he never spoke.

In the afternoon, testimony from Ann Gordon, a forensic scientist for the Michigan State Police, was halted after defense attorneys demanded the notes Gordon used to prepare her reports on the case.

Attorneys for both Hollands said they should be able to inspect what Gordon used to produce the reports.

"I have a right to see what this witness has relied upon," Lisa Holland's co-counsel Mike Nichols told Judge Rosemarie Aquilina.

Assistant Prosecutor Mike Ferency asked for a continuance until today, saying he needed to meet with the state Attorney General's office, which oversees Gordon's work.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com

Michigan Senate targets child molesters, rapists

3/28/2006, 4:43 p.m. ET

By DAVID EGGERT
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — The state Senate voted overwhelmingly Tuesday to require that repeat child molesters and rapists spend life in prison with no possibility of parole, an effort to keep dangerous predators off the streets.

One Senate bill, passed 36-0, would require a life sentence without parole for first-degree criminal sexual conduct convictions if the victim is under age 13, the offender is older than 16 and has been convicted of a sex crime before.

Republican Sen. Tony Stamas of Midland said he introduced the bill after he and his wife saw a news report about a released sex offender attacking a young child.

"We see too many of these tragic incidents," Stamas said. "You see these stories over and over again where people continue to commit these heinous crimes."

Another Senate bill would require that offenders released from prison be fitted with devices to electronically track their movements with global positioning technology. The monitoring would continue for life if they had been convicted of first- or second-degree criminal sexual conduct. The bills now head to the House, which passed similar legislation two weeks ago.

The House voted after hearing from Florida resident Mark Lunsford, whose 9-year-old daughter Jessica was sexually assaulted and killed last year.

Authorities say Jessica was abducted in February 2005, and carried 150 yards to a mobile home her attacker shared with other adults, where he raped her and then buried her alive in the yard.

Investigators say a convicted sex offender confessed to the killing last March, the day before the third-grader's body was found stuffed into trash bags. He later pleaded not guilty and faces trial this summer.

The House legislation calls for a minimum 25-year sentence for anyone 17 or older convicted of first-degree criminal sexual conduct against a child under the age of 13.

Several states are looking at creating laws similar to what's known in Florida as Jessica's Law. That state now has longer sentences and the prospect of lifetime electronic monitoring for some sex offenders once they are released from prison.

The sex offender bills are House Bills 5421-22 and 5531-33 and Senate Bills 709, 717-18 and 1122.

On the Net:

Michigan Legislature: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

Michigan Report

March 28, 2006

SENATE PASSES CHILD ABUSE BILLS

Repeat sex offenders who victimize children would face life in prison without parole under legislation approved by the Senate on Tuesday

Companion bills would also require some individuals paroled for criminal sexual abuse to be monitored electronically during the time of their parole.

Passed unanimously on Tuesday were SB 709, SB 717, SB 718, SB 1122, SB 1146 and SB 1147.

Sen. Tony Stamas (R-Midland), sponsor of SB 709, said criminals who “harm children should be behind bars for good.”

Under the main bill if a defendant is older than 17 and the victim is younger than 13 then he or she would be sentenced to life imprisonment without parole.

Under SB 1122, a person convicted to parolable first degree criminal sexual conduct would be required to wear an electronic monitoring device during the duration of his or her parole.

Woman pleads no contest in child abuse case

Petoskey News Review

Tuesday, March 28, 2006 1:13 PM EST

A Bayshore woman is facing up to a year in jail after she pleaded no contest Monday to a charge of child abuse.

Elizabeth Mason, 21, was arraigned in 90th District Court on one count of fourth degree child abuse, a one-year misdemeanor charge.

At her arraignment, Mason pleaded no contest to the charge as agreements that will resolve both the criminal case and matters pending in probate court, Emmet County chief assistant prosecutor Eric Kaiser said.

A no-contest plea is treated like a guilty plea in that the defendant is held responsible for the crime and is subject to the penalties that the charge carries. It is typically only allowed in cases where civil litigation might result from the case or the defendant can't remember the circumstances surrounding the incident.

According to the Michigan State Police, the charge stems from an incident involving Mason's 2-year-old son that took place in late January.

Police said her son returned to his father's home after a visit to Mason's home with "deep and excessive bruising covering most of his buttocks." Police said Mason could not provide an explanation for the bruising and denied seeing the injuries on him before dropping him off at his father's home.

Investigators said a doctor who examined the boy called his injuries "a clear case of child abuse." Police said they learned that a paddle had caused the injuries and that they later recovered a wooden paddle from Mason's home.

A forensic examination of the paddle at the crime lab in Grayling revealed possible blood stains on the edge of the paddle, according to police.

Mason's sentencing date has not yet been set.

Parents Of Wandering Child Located

Police Believe Incident Was Accidental

POSTED: 11:51 am EST March 28, 2006

UPDATED: 3:05 pm EST March 28, 2006

The parents of a 2-year-old boy found wandering on Detroit's east side Tuesday morning were questioned by police.

The boy was found in the area of Bloom and Hamlet streets at about 11 a.m., Local 4 reported.

He was taken to the Detroit Police Department Child Abuse Unit.

Police did not know the toddler's name, but he kept saying, "Man-Man." A description of the boy was released to the media in an effort to locate his parents.

Meanwhile, the boy's parents said that when they woke up Tuesday morning, they noticed the toddler was missing, Local 4 learned. They went to the Detroit Police Department's 11th Precinct to file a report.

The parents said the boy likes to follow his siblings to school, and believe the older siblings left a door open when they left home earlier in the morning. The toddler was found about a block away from his home, according to police.

Police believe the incident was accidental.

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Adrian Daily Telegram News

Former track coach pleads guilty

Tuesday, March 28, 2006 8:31 AM EST

Matthew James Peterson confesses to assault and child pornography charges.

By Dennis Pelham

Daily Telegram Staff Writer

ADRIAN - Guilty pleas to assault and pornography charges were taken Monday in Lenawee County Circuit Court from former Tecumseh High School track coach Matthew James Peterson.

Peterson admitted playing a videotape to groups of students at his home that showed two Tecumseh teens having sex. The 33-year-old teacher also admitted violent assaults on his wife in November and December at their Tecumseh home.

Peterson is also to admit for sentencing and restitution purposes to a series of offenses that include soliciting sexual activity, providing alcohol to minors and fraudulent sales of counterfeit Rolex watches over the Internet.

Part of the plea agreement sets a maximum one-year jail sentence in the cases involving assaults on Peterson's wife. No sentencing limits were included in the pornography charges, which carry a maximum seven-year prison term. Sentencing was scheduled for May 4.

"I think it's a fair outcome. We're happy that justice was served," said Chief Mack Haun of the Tecumseh Police Department. "It was a very long, complex case. We don't have these come along very often."

Allegations of sex offenses and of alcohol and drug abuse involving Peterson and high school students were under investigation by Tecumseh police for two years before he was arrested in December. A half-dozen former students have also been prosecuted on charges ranging from sexual assault to fraud.

Peterson worked as a varsity track coach at Tecumseh High School several years ago but taught at other schools.

Plea agreements wrapped up Monday with Peterson are the final pieces in the prosecution of all cases to arise out of the lengthy investigation led by Assistant Chief John Clark of the Tecumseh Police Department.

The case against Peterson was accelerated in December when his estranged wife reported several assaults. He was held on bonds that totaled as much as \$2.2 million in the assault cases after bond violations were reported. He has remained in jail since Dec. 14.

Criminal sexual conduct charges carrying maximum life prison terms are to be dismissed as part of an agreement in which Peterson pleaded guilty to assault with intent to do great bodily harm and a misdemeanor aggravated domestic violence count.

“I smacked my wife in the face,” Peterson said in pleading guilty in the assault cases.

Assistant Lenawee County prosecutor Douglas Hartung said in both assault cases Peterson is admitting that his wife suffered physical injuries and bruising.

Defense attorney Joseph Simon of Ann Arbor said the agreement in the case includes limiting sentencing to a maximum one year in the county jail and five years' probation. Hartung said Peterson is also to be prohibited from entering the city of Tecumseh, to be routinely tested for drug and alcohol use and to continue counseling during probation.

No sentence limit was included in the cases involving illegal behavior with teenage students in 2003 and 2004. Peterson faces a maximum seven-year prison term for two charges of distributing child pornography and a four-year sentence for one count of possessing child pornography.

Peterson said he played a videotape of a 16-year-old girl and 17-year-old boy having sex to members of the track team during a party.

“I allowed these particular students to watch a pornographic movie involving two high school students at my home,” Peterson said. In pleading guilty to a second distributing charge, Peterson said he played the same tape the next day for a different group of students.

Hillman teacher must relinquish teaching certificate

Alpena News

March 29, 2006

A Hillman High School teacher charged with alleged criminal sexual conduct has 45 days to relinquish his teaching certificate, according to a court agreement filed last week.

Michael Wojda, 50, pleaded no contest to two counts of assault and battery at a hearing in Atlanta Friday.

According to the agreement terms, Wojda must retire from Hillman Community Schools and give up his teaching certificate. Following sentencing, he also will be required to register as a sex offender, since the alleged conduct included sexual contact.

Montmorency County Prosecutor Terrie Case said the charges were reduced to assault and battery with the understanding Wojda would no longer teach anywhere.

“I wanted to make sure his teaching certificate was taken away forever,” she said.

Wojda was charged last May with CSC second and fourth degree following an investigation where he allegedly had sexual contact with two former female students. Case said the incidents occurred between 1998 and 2004.

Hillman Superintendent Tom Harmon said Wojda has been on paid administrative leave since November 2004, in accordance with the investigation. Prior to the incident, Wojda taught biology, government and current affairs at the high school.

Case said Wojda’s sentencing will take place within two months.

Jason Witz can be reached via e-mail at jwitz@thealpenanews.com or by phone at 354-3111 ext. 318.

Police: Teacher Bought Porn For Students

Teacher Put On Administrative Leave

POSTED: 11:46 pm EST March 28, 2006

UPDATED: 12:00 am EST March 29, 2006

HUEYTOWN, Ala. -- An Alabama high school teacher is accused of buying X-rated videos for students.

Brett Drummond, a Spanish teacher at a high school in Hueytown, faces a felony charge and two misdemeanors, according to Birmingham, Ala., television station WVTM.

Drummond is accused of buying pornography for two male students at the school.

"They were X-rated, sexually explicit adult videos," said Sgt. Chuck Hagler, of the Hueytown Police Department. "He had regular contact with the students' tutor, whether or not they attended a regular class, I'm not certain at this time."

Hagler said Drummond admitted to some of the allegations, which came out a couple of days ago when one of the boys told his parents.

Drummond has been put on paid administrative leave pending the results of the investigation.

Distributed by Internet Broadcasting Systems, Inc.

Metro Detroit

BRIAN DICKERSON: Childhood sex offender seeks a second chance

March 29, 2006

BY BRIAN DICKERSON
FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

Leah DuBuc, 21, is to testify Thursday in Lansing about the impact of being on the state's online sex-offender registry.

Whatever picture comes to mind when you think of sexual predators, it probably isn't Leah DuBuc's.

DuBuc was just 10 years old when she was charged with molesting her younger stepsiblings. Now a 21-year-old senior at Western Michigan University, DuBuc completed her probation five years ago and hasn't had any legal difficulties more serious than a speeding ticket since then. But DuBuc is one of 37,000 people whose names and photographs appear on Michigan's online sex-offender registry.

On Thursday, she'll tell a panel of state legislators looking into the registry how continuing persecution for her childhood misconduct has stunted her opportunities as an adult.

Testifying in Lansing will make even more people aware of her sex-offender status, but DuBuc says she has little to lose.

"I don't care if you use my name," she told me. "This registry has already ruined the short life I've lived so far."

All 50 states maintain sex-offender registries. Michigan -- the eighth-largest state by population -- boasts the nation's third-largest registry, with more than 38,000 people listed for crimes ranging from violent sexual assault to consensual petting with an underage boyfriend or girlfriend.

New York, with a population twice as large as Michigan's, lists 16,000 fewer sex offenders.

The Michigan State Police don't know what percentage of the offenders listed are sexual predators considered at high risk of repeating their illegal behavior. But five years of reporting have convinced me that only a fraction of the 23,000 registered offenders who are not incarcerated pose a continuing threat.

Many of the rest are former youthful offenders like DuBuc, who face lifetimes of ostracism for childhood sex play.

The conduct that landed DuBuc in an Illinois facility for juvenile sex offenders came to light in 1995, when a police officer visited her fourth-grade class in Howell to talk about child and substance abuse.

DuBuc sought him out to complain about the way her stepmother was treating her and her natural sister. Police investigated and determined that some inappropriate sex play had taken place between DuBuc and her younger stepsiblings.

"There was never any actual sex," DuBuc recalls. "But there was definitely inappropriate behavior -- I'll flash you if you'll flash me, that sort of thing."

There also was simulated intercourse "where we kept our clothes on but pretended to have sex ... I didn't think it was illegal, but I would say I thought it wasn't right."

The police investigation led to a juvenile criminal proceeding in which DuBuc admitted to criminal sexual conduct involving four stepsiblings ages 5 to 9.

She spent 18 months at Indian Oaks Academy, a treatment facility for young female sex offenders, before returning to Howell, where she excelled academically and completed her probation without incident.

No one I've talked to believes DuBuc is a threat to anyone, but under Michigan law, she's destined to remain on the registry until she's 37.

DuBuc says her status as a registered sex offender has led to harassing phone calls, ugly on-campus confrontations and rejected job applications. Managers at McDonald's, Burger King and Subway have told her they don't hire anyone listed on the registry.

Frustrated in her search for minimum-wage work, DuBuc has spent her college summers volunteering at a Guatemalan orphanage and taught English at a church in Japan.

"I'm blessed," she says, "that God doesn't do criminal background checks."

All she wants now, DuBuc says, is an opportunity to prove to a judge or jury that she never belonged on the sex-offender registry.

DuBuc has atoned for her mistakes. Can state legislators match her example?

Contact **BRIAN DICKERSON** at 248-351-3697 or bdickerson@freepress.com.

Prosecutor offers deal in pornography case

Wednesday, March 29, 2006

By Bryce Hoekenga
Special to the Gazette

ALLEGAN -- In exchange for a guilty plea, authorities have offered to drop two of three charges against a Wayland teen accused of posting a sexually explicit photo of classmates on the Internet. "Further negotiations are necessary, but it's a good starting point," defense attorney Courtney Flanagan said outside court Tuesday, moments after the offer was disclosed at a brief hearing. She wants to keep Ryan Zylstra "off the sex-offender registry and out of jail."

"At worst," Flanagan said, "this is a prank gone wrong."

Ryan Zylstra, 17, waived his right to a preliminary hearing Tuesday in Allegan County District Court and was bound over for trial in Allegan County Circuit Court, where he is set to be arraigned April 7 on felony charges of distributing child pornography and using a computer for child pornography. Because the girl is 16, the material is considered sexually abusive under state law.

Flanagan and Assistant Prosecutor Robert Champion said the two sides are working on a deal. Authorities are willing to drop charges of child sexually abusive activity and use of a computer to carry out the crime, each carrying a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison, Champion said. The deal still would require Zylstra to plead guilty to promoting sexually abusive material, which carries a maximum of seven years, he said. The actual punishment, however, likely would be less.

"The victims think it's important that people realize it's a serious offense," Champion said. Zylstra threw a New Year's Eve party at his Wayland home, where he allegedly photographed a 16-year-old girl having sex with her 17-year-old boyfriend. Zylstra is accused of putting the photo on the Internet Jan. 1.

The girl was so upset about the photo that she attempted suicide, according to a police report. Gazette News Service contributed to this report.

Michigan Report

March 28, 2006

APPOINTMENTS BY THE GOVERNOR

STATE CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT PREVENTION BOARD: Tamara Vander Ark of Grand Haven to represent organized labor, succeeding Eliane Crawford, for a term expiring December 19, 2007. Senate approval is required.

Highfields takes steps to reopen Leader removed; MSU prof to review corrective action plan

By Matthew Miller
Lansing State Journal

Published March 29, 2006

A judge who last month pulled juvenile offenders out of the Highfields residential care facility has called the dismissal of the agency's president and chief executive Jim Hines a positive step that could allow the facility to reopen "sooner rather than later."

"Sometimes, when you have to make changes in your organization, you have to have someone who's an agent of change," said Ingham County Probate Judge Richard Garcia, "and it appears that the board has decided to bring in some folks who can hopefully embrace change."

Highfields' board of directors voted Monday to remove Hines from his post.

Board Chairman Charles Corley said that decision, announced Tuesday, was part of an ongoing effort to correct the problems that led a group of Ingham County judges to pull 18 boys from the Onondaga facility last month. Highfields' board has since suspended the treatment program and sent its remaining charges home.

Earlier this month, the state Department of Human Services cited Highfields for use of "excessive physical restraint" by staff members and for failure to prevent or to report a hazing incident. The department also has recommended disciplinary action that could include revocation of Highfields' license.

Corley, however, stopped short of laying the blame for those incidents on Hines.

"Jim Hines will always be remembered as an asset to Highfields," he said at a noon press conference.

Hines, who has worked at Highfields for 28 years, said he and the agency's staff had made a good faith effort to address the problems, which were made public last month.

He said he believed he was dismissed because board members wanted to show "the seriousness with which Highfields is taking this."

Corley said an interim replacement for Hines would be announced in the coming days.

The agency fired two employees from the its juvenile care program last month after an investigation found they had taken a resident outside in frigid weather without a coat.

Several other staff members have been reprimanded.

Garcia said he has been heading a work group made up of staff from the 30th Judicial Circuit Court that will lay out suggestions and expectations regarding what Highfields would need to change "to serve Ingham County kids again."

"We're not just sitting back and saying, 'OK, Highfields, go ahead and figure something out, and let us know.' "

Highfields also has received two reports on the incidents this month, one compiled by several Ingham County judges, the other from DHS.

Those reports will be the basis of a corrective action plan that will address safety, communication and training for staff, Corley said, though he added that it may be more than three months before the plan is finalized and that it would be "premature" to disclose further details.

That plan will be prepared with the help of David Roush, a professor of criminal justice at Michigan State University and director of the National Juvenile Detention Association Center for Research & Professional Development.

Roush, who will start his work with the agency later this week, said addressing the issues raised by the state and the group of judges will be a primary concern.

"We are dealing with an institution that has maintained an excellent reputation for many years," he said, "so clearly the goal will be to restore that reputation."

Contact Matthew Miller at 377-1046 or mrmiller@lsj.com.

What's next

- David Roush, a professor of criminal justice at Michigan State University, will later this week begin reviewing the corrective action plan being prepared by Highfields Inc. An interim replacement for president and CEO Jim Hines, who was removed from his post by the board, will be announced in the next few days.

Wayne County

County to fund school at detention facility

March 29, 2006

BY ZACHARY GORCHOW
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Wayne County has agreed to give \$560,000 to the charter school that educates children at the county's Juvenile Detention Facility following a period in which the school's private management company quit under pressure over how much it charged for its services.

The funding comes as the Benjamin Carson Academy seeks to meet a Friday deadline set by its charter-granting authority, the Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency, to complete changes to its operations and secure its finances.

"The county recognizes their responsibility to fill the hole, that we have to provide services for kids," said Sue Hamilton-Smith, interim director of the county's Department of Child and Family Services.

The Regional Educational Service Agency revoked the school's charter effective June 30 but could reconsider that decision if Carson's school board implements several changes before Friday.

All sides voiced optimism that Carson officials would satisfy the requirements.

It has been a tumultuous year at the school, which provides education to the 3,000 to 4,000 children who go through the juvenile facility each year, or about 175 on any given day. Carson runs its own operations within the facility.

Children at the detention facility largely are awaiting the outcome of their cases or placement in a residential facility for substance abuse or mental health treatment.

Concerns about the financial practices of the private management company that operated Carson, New Jersey-based Innovative Education Programs, culminated in February with the company terminating its contract with the school -- a move that came with the board under pressure to fire the company.

The school's board has hired a temporary manager, the Alliance for Professional Education, as it searches for a permanent one.

Innovative Education Programs came under sharp criticism for how much it charged to run its operations. The school cost \$12,500 a day to run at the start of the 2005-06 school year. But since the company left, the cost has been pared down to \$11,100 a day, said Larry Wilkerson, the school's chief financial officer.

That move, coupled with the \$560,000 from the county, would allow the school to expand the number of school days from 180 to 200 and remain in session through June 30, Wilkerson said. The county once provided a similar subsidy to the school but stopped in 2003 when Innovative Education refused county officials' requests to examine its books. Instead, the county gave a smaller amount of money to continue summer school programs at Carson.

"Now we don't have that problem," Hamilton-Smith said. "We're all looking at the same pieces of paper."

Help from the county is needed, said Blandina Rose, Regional Educational Service Agency's public school academy manager.

"According to what they have submitted to RESA, they would really need some support from the county to make it through the rest of the year," she said.

Besides securing funding from the county, the school also must take other actions to convince the agency to reverse its decision on the school's charter, Rose said.

The school's board has two vacancies that need to be filled, and the board needs to hire a permanent management company, Rose said.

Rose said it's possible that the agency's board could extend the deadline for the school to find a permanent manager .

Contact **ZACHARY GORCHOW** at 313-223-4536 or zgorchow@freepress.com.

Michigan Report

March 28, 2006

COX: MOTHER HAS CUSTODY OF OUT-OF-WEDLOCK CHILD

When both parents of an out-of-wedlock child acknowledge parentage, the mother automatically has custody unless there is an intervening agreement between them or a court rule saying otherwise, Attorney General Mike Cox ruled Tuesday in Opinion 7191.

Mr. Cox said the law establishing the affidavit of parentage both parents can acknowledge and which would then be filed with the state, presumes custody of the child is with the mother.

But custody can be altered if there is an agreement between the two parents, Mr. Cox said.

In addition, a court ruling can alter the custody provision, Mr. Cox said.

MIRS

March 29, 2006

Mother Gets Out-of-Wedlock Kid By Default

Unless a mother and father or the courts make other arrangements, the mother has default custody of any child born out of wedlock, Attorney General Mike COX opined today.

In Opinion No. 7191, Cox responded to a question posted by Livingston County Prosecutor David **MORSE** that if an "affidavit of parentage" legally gives the mother of a child born out of wedlock custody of the child named in the affidavit.

To that, Cox ruled in the affirmative. The police can rely on the affidavit of parentage that can be voluntarily signed by a couple of unmarried people after the birth of a child unless there's a court order or written agreement that states something to the contrary.

Michigan Report

March 28, 2006

GRANHOLM EXPANDS DENTAL PROGRAM

The Healthy Kids Dental Program will cover children in an additional 22 counties under a plan announced Tuesday by Governor Jennifer Granholm. The change would cover another 40,000 low-income children.

The change will not require additional state funding, Ms. Granholm said. It involves an agreement with Delta Dental-participating dentists to accept lower fees for the children qualifying.

“We are proud that we have been able to partner with dentists around the state to extend this critical coverage to more children,” Ms. Granholm said.

“The expansion of Healthy Kids Dental reflects the state's commitment to improving the oral health of Medicaid-eligible children throughout Michigan,” said Thomas Fleszar, president of Delta Dental. “This dynamic public-private partnership demonstrates that by working together, we can provide needed care for thousands of children and, at the same time, help them establish good oral health habits that will last a lifetime.”

Granholt signs bill to boost minimum wage

3/28/2006, 2:49 p.m. ET

By TIM MARTIN
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — If Shannon Faust sticks with her job at a Lansing day care center, she'll get a raise in October.

Faust is one of tens of thousands of Michigan workers who stand to earn higher hourly pay after Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed legislation Tuesday boosting the minimum wage for the first time in nine years.

Michigan's minimum wage — now \$5.15 an hour — will climb to \$6.95 an hour in October. The law calls for the rate to rise to \$7.15 an hour in July 2007 and to \$7.40 an hour in July 2008.

"It's about time this happened," said Faust, who worked on the campaign to raise the minimum wage with a group called Michigan ACORN. "It will be significant for a lot of people."

Faust, 33, is a single parent and a full-time college student on track to graduate this year. She says she has struggled to make ends meet on the \$6.75 an hour she now earns.

Granholm called the new law a "tremendous victory for all working families" and said it should help Michigan's economy, giving low-income workers more money to spend.

But some in the business community say the rise in the low-end wage will lead to higher costs that could get passed onto customers through higher prices.

Workers at The Peanut Shop in downtown Lansing already start at about \$7 an hour. But Tammy Melser, one of the snack shop's owners, says that businesses required to raise their wages also may raise prices in response.

"How else will they make up the money?" she said.

Michigan's \$5.15 hourly minimum wage now matches the federal minimum wage. At least 17 states and the District of Columbia have higher minimum wages.

The Republican-dominated state Legislature passed the wage increase this month after it became evident that a petition drive to put the issue before voters this November was headed toward success.

The Michigan Needs a Raise coalition — including labor unions, the Michigan Democratic Party and other groups such as Michigan ACORN — has dropped the ballot campaign and is declaring victory in the minimum wage fight.

But the coalition and Democrats, including Granholm, say more should be done to help Michigan's low-income workers.

The bill signed by Granholm does not address restaurant workers or others who rely on tips.

Democrats also would like to tie future minimum wage increases to the inflation rate, which is not addressed in the new law.

"We've still got a lot of work to do," said Democratic Sen. Ray Basham of Taylor, who sponsored the minimum wage bill.

The ballot proposal would have raised the wage to \$6.85 an hour in January. Future increases would have been tied to the inflation rate. It also would have put the minimum wage increase in the state constitution, making it harder to change.

The inflationary increases and the constitutional provision concerned some Republicans, who decided it would be better to pass their version of a minimum wage hike now than to see the coalition's version pass in November.

About 90,000 of Michigan's 2.9 million workers — around 3 percent — were paid at or below the minimum wage in 2004, state figures show. Thousands more make less than \$6.95 an hour.

The minimum wage bill is Senate Bill 318.

On the Net:

Michigan Legislature: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

Michigan Needs a Raise: <http://www.mineedsaraise.org>

Gov. Jennifer Granholm: <http://www.michigan.gov/gov>

Wage increase could change workforce, prices

By Matt Whetstone, Cadillac News

March 29, 2006

CADILLAC - In a week's time, Mike Shanahan will have a new job paying more than the recently approved minimum wage of \$6.95 an hour.

Until then, Shanahan is earning less working at Little Caesars in Haring Township. Although he'll soon be making more, he said he believes the rate should increase and that the \$5.15 rate is not enough.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm agreed with that assessment Tuesday, inking legislation that bumps the rate to \$6.95 in October, to \$7.15 in July 2007 and to \$7.40 in July 2008.

Granholm called the new law a "tremendous victory for all working families" and said it should help Michigan's economy by giving low-income workers more money to spend.

Business owners have different opinions.

Leigh Gifford, owner of the Little Caesars franchise, said it will be hard to hire a 16-year-old at the new wage.

"There's not too many that have the experience to be worth it," Gifford said. "As an employer, I won't pay a 16-year old that kind of money."

Chad Vandertuig, owner of the Tasty Treat in Lake City, said the raise won't have much of an effect on his business because waitresses and cooks earn tips. But he doesn't believe the move was done in the most effective manner.

The bill signed by Granholm does not address restaurant workers or others who rely on tips.

"They should have done it like other state where if you're 18 and older, it's one limit, and for a high school student, it's another limit," Vandertuig said.

For some restaurants, Vandertuig said it may lead to higher prices or longer lines because the owners may not be able to afford extra help.

Mike McGuire, owner of McGuire's Resort in Cadillac, said he doesn't think the answer to boosting the economy lies in raising the minimum wage.

"I think the answer is increasing business; increasing that will drive wages on its own," he said.

Wayne Fox, owner of the Cadillac Sands Resort, said about 70 percent of his workforce earns less than \$7.

“What we have to do is increase our rates,” Fox said. “The guy that's going to pay for it is Joe Consumer.”

Lodging rates are directly proportionate to wages, Fox said, meaning that to adjust to increased expenses, there has to be increased revenue.

According to state figures, about 90,000 of Michigan's 2.9 million workers, about 3 percent, were paid below the minimum wage in 2004. Thousands more make less than \$6.95 per hour.

The Associated Press contributed to this article.

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Minimum wage hike doesn't affect home care

By JOHN EBY / Dowagiac Daily News

Wednesday, March 29, 2006 11:01 AM EST

Home care workers, who are not affected by the minimum wage boost Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed Tuesday, also seek increased wages, training and benefits.

The state has more than 42,000 home care workers serving 50,000 low-income senior citizens and people with disabilities, including approximately 148 workers in Cass County.

In her proposed 2007 budget, Gov. Jennifer Granholm called for \$20 million to increase wages for home care workers.

The Michigan Senate passed Granholm's budget Tuesday. It now heads to the House.

Pay for home care workers comes from the federal-state Medicaid program, but varies by region largely according to need and population.

In Cass County, the wage - estimated through payments to workers for specific services performed - amounts to about \$6 per hour, according to Michael Zalewski, spokesman for the Michigan Campaign for Quality Care.

The Michigan Quality Home Care Coalition is the advocacy group representing low-income seniors and disabled residents pressing lawmakers to boost wages.

"About 50,000 low-income seniors and disabled residents receive home care in Michigan, 174 in Cass County," Zalewski said. "In Cass, home care workers include middle-aged women taking care of their children to seniors, as home care workers, taking care of other seniors.

"Many home care workers earn incomes below the official poverty threshold," he said. "Many struggle to meet basic daily needs and are forced to make difficult choices between caring for themselves or caring for others.

"Many have been forced to take on multiple minimum-wage jobs just to survive. The low wages paid to home care workers have fueled a high turnover rate, 35 percent, that threatens vital care for senior citizens and people with disabilities."

In addition to the 174 beneficiaries of home care in Cass County, there are 348 in Van Buren County and 783 in Berrien County - a total of 1,305.

Zalewski said the state spent \$685,000 in Cass County alone providing what is primarily supplemental care for the elderly.

Michigan home care provides a humane and cost-effective long-term care solution, saving the state millions in avoided institutional care, he said.

Zalewski shared the example of a Greenville woman who juggles jobs at Burger King and Meijer with \$180 a month she makes caring for her mentally disabled brother. That works out to about \$3 an hour for the time-consuming care she provides, Zalewski said.

Heat help warms hearts and homes

Wednesday, March 29, 2006

By Susan J. Demas
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MaryJane Moyer never saw it coming. Black ice is like that.

"I rolled my Jeep four or five times," recalled Moyer, who lives in Jackson with her husband and 3-year-old daughter, "but I don't remember it."

That was just before Christmas. This month, still out of work with hip and back injuries and mounting medical bills, Moyer was days away from getting her heat shut off. She couldn't make the \$215-per-month payments.

Enter the Warm Hearts-Warm Homes program. A joint effort of about 40 local organizations and churches, the initiative started in December provides funds to low-income residents to pay their utility bills. It also aims to ensure they don't slip through the cracks after winter's end.

The Moyers are one of the first five families to get a helping hand from the program; in their case, it has meant more than \$1,000.

"I've never been faced with something like this before," Moyer said. "The people have been great."

More than 2,000 Jackson County residents called for assistance paying utility bills last year. That figure is expected to rise this year, said Bethany Timmons, director of community impact for United Way of Jackson County, which is coordinating the program.

Organizers have raised more than \$55,000 since January, bolstered by Friday night's bonfire fund-raiser at Westwinds Community Church.

The goal is to collect \$75,000 by spring to make a dent in the estimated \$300,000-plus the initiative needs to help about 500 people, Timmons said.

The Community Action Agency helps administer the program, which requires people to provide proof of financial need.

Even with a mild winter, utility costs spiked more than 40 percent nationwide after hurricanes Katrina and Rita slammed into Gulf Coast oil refineries.

And many Jackson-area residents are reeling from Michigan's faltering economy.

Those on the state's Winter Protection Plan receive a reduced heating bill from Nov. 1 to March 31. But they are often faced with a staggering balance to pay off come spring, Timmons said.

"Nobody wants to cut someone's heat off," she said, "but then bills actually go up in the summer -- which is surprising to people."

Next up is starting a home-winterizing program teaching clients money-saving tips to shut out the cold. Timmons said the long-term project will start taking shape in the upcoming weeks.

"We want to be preventative vs. reactive," Timmons said. "We want to meet all their needs."

Michigan Report

March 28, 2006

REPORT SHOWS DETROIT CHILDREN STRUGGLING

Conditions for mothers and children in Michigan are near the national average, but children in Detroit face significantly worse conditions, according to a report to be released Wednesday.

Right Start 2006, to be released by Kids Count, will report Detroit was at the bottom among the 50 largest urban areas in the nation.

The state's largest city also had the largest percentage of preterm births, 17.8 percent, among the 50 largest cities. It tied New Orleans for the most low-birth weight babies at 13.5 percent.

Detroit also saw more mothers receiving no or late prenatal care, 8.4 percent compared to 3.1 percent nationally.

Michigan bested the national average in the number of children born to mothers without high school educations (17 percent, compared to 22 percent nationally), but saw more children, 15 percent, born to mothers who smoked. The national average for that was 11 percent.

Michigan ranked 22nd for children born to teens and 23 for children born prematurely.

Michigan Report

March 28, 2006

PANEL DIFFERS ON HOW TO MEET FEDERAL WORK REQUIREMENTS

Republican lawmakers on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services say the state can meet federal work requirements for people on welfare assistance by enforcing standards of work on more people already involved in the Work First program. But an official from the Department of Human Services and Democratic lawmakers on the panel opposed that argument Tuesday.

Rep. Bruce Caswell (R-Hillsdale) said instead of providing a \$50 million state program that assists people with extreme barriers to work, in order to meet federal work requirements for cash assistance, the focus should be on the percentages of people under the Work First program who may only be a few hours shy of making the work requirement.

“We’ve got everybody working at some degree, we just have to bring them up to the hours they need to meet the requirement,” he said. “We don’t need to reinvent the wheel.”

But Don Mussen, acting director of Family Support Services for DHS, said that transforming more of the 29,000 people in Work First into longer work hours is not so simple. The state must provide more programs that educate and train people so that they are able to succeed at work and at self-sufficiency, he said. Approximately 15 percent of the group is meeting or exceeding the minimum work requirement, Mr. Mussen said, adding that no state has ever been able to get 100 percent of their work group to meet the standards.

Mr. Caswell said he agreed that providing more support services is important and proposed the \$50 million, or at least part of it, be used to do so.

Mr. Mussen said implementation of the Jobs, Education and Training pilot programs (JET) will help the state in building a stronger workforce in Michigan and will promote people to more self-sufficiency. But Rep. Jerry Kooiman (R-Grand Rapids) said that if the administration is so supportive of the JET program, then they should be rolling it out statewide at one time.

Mr. Kooiman was also concerned that caseworkers will not be able to implement the JET program because they are already overworked. He said if lawmakers are going to bite the bullet and hire more caseworkers than it should be for a program that is statewide, or at least available in the metropolitan areas where most of the casework occurs.

Still, Rep. George Cushingberry (D-Detroit) offered his own suggestions for the budget, saying that he would like to see the basic cash grant awarded to clients increased by 33.3 percent, day care payments raised by 25 percent, placement of Work First participants into friend of the court programs, opening the Medicaid program from 60,000 recipients to 100,000 and increase the number of DHS workers by 200 to 400 people.

Mr. Cushingberry requested that his proposals be evaluated by the House Fiscal Agency as proposed amendments to the DHS budget bill.

Coalition promotes awareness of Earned Income Tax Credit

Port Huron Times Herald Letters

More than \$3.1 million in federal tax credits went unclaimed by St. Clair County residents in 2003. With Michigan's high unemployment rate many families are struggling to make ends meet. I am hopeful that letting people know about the Earned Income Tax Credit will encourage everyone to find out if they qualify. Nearly 200,000 eligible Michigan residents - more than one-third-did not collect the federal EITC. The state EITC Coalition was created through federal grants to get more taxpayers to take advantage of this tax credit. Low-income residents could receive up to \$4,400 in tax-credit refunds by filing for the EITC.

The other great part of this program is all taxpayers who qualify for the EITC will get their state and federal taxes done for free. This money belongs to the taxpayers most in need, not with the government.

People who qualify for the EITC are:

Workers who earned \$31,030 or less in 2005 with one qualifying child (\$33,030 for married and filing jointly) to receive a credit up to \$2,662;

Workers who earned \$35,263 or less in 2005 with more than one qualifying child (\$37,263 for married and filing jointly) to receive a credit up to \$4,400;

Workers who earned \$11,750 or less in 2005 with no qualifying child (\$13,750 for married and filing jointly) to receive a credit up to \$399 (must be between the ages of 24 and 65).

The campaign to promote awareness for the EITC will continue through the 2006 tax season. More information and a comprehensive list of participating regional offices is available at www.gophouse.com/claimyourcash.htm.

PHIL PAVLOV
State Representative
District 81
Lansing, March 24

Originally published March 28, 2006

What's Good For K-16 Is Good For SBT?

Sen. Deb **CHERRY** (D-Burton) added an interesting twist to today's Senate discussions on three Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 budgets when she pushed for a measure requiring fiscal experts to compile a list of public health services that would be cut if the early repeal of the Single Business Tax (SBT) was signed and a replacement wasn't found in time.

Cherry's suggestion came in the form of an amendment to the Department of Community Health (DCH) budget, SB 1083, which eventually passed the Senate, 33-5. Her argument was passed on the argument that Republicans are asking department to show how passing a measure guaranteeing inflationary state funding increases to K-12 schools, colleges and universities would impact their budgets.

It would only make sense that same type of fiscal scrutiny be given to the Republicans' idea that the state's \$1.8 billion business tax be eliminated, she said.

"(The departments) need to know the impact like they know the impact of the K-16 proposal," Cherry argued.

This amendment was defeated on a party-line vote and highlighted today's action in the Senate on next fiscal year's budget. Besides the DCH budget, the Senate took votes on the community colleges budget (SB 1082) and the K-12 School Aid bill (SB 1095), but then held the bills, presumably so they could pass all of the appropriations bills together.

SB 1083, which is sponsored by Cherry, passed 33-5 with Sens. Bob **EMERSON** (D-Flint), Sen. Bruce **PATTERSON** (R-Livonia), Laura **TOY** (R-Livonia), Martha G. **SCOTT** (D-Highland Park) and Irma **CLARK-COLEMAN** (D-Detroit) voting no, but not without some proposed changes.

Cherry offered up a doomed amendment that would have eliminated a requirement that Medicaid clients pay premiums and co-payments. Her argument was that this requirement would simply be too burdensome on Medicaid patients who cannot afford co-payments. If forced to pay the co-pays, many people would not receive Medicaid services, Cherry said.

"Any premium or co-pay is really a hindrance of care," Cherry said.

Sen. Tom **GEORGE** (R-Texas Twp.) opposed Cherry's measure, arguing that if Medicaid patient were held somewhat responsible for their care, they would take better care of themselves. The Senate had a similar argument about this issue last year.

"I really believe the secret to making Medicaid work better is making the Medicaid population healthier," George said.

Sen. Hansen **CLARKE** (D-Detroit) added an amendment that would allow the Legislature to further increase funding to free clinics, which currently receive \$250,000. This amendment passed.

Sen. Gerald **VAN WOERKOM** (R-Norton Shores) added an amendment that would add \$25,000 to establish a diabetes education program in Muskegon. Muskegon is one region of the United States that has one of the highest populations of diabetics.

"I see this as a way to actually reduce the cost of Medicaid to the state because they can learn to take care of their diabetes in a better fashion," Van Woerkom said.

This amendment also passed.

Clarke tried restoring a proposed \$35 million cut to the Wayne County Mental Health Agency if the agency did not become an authority by July 1, 2007. Clarke argued that the agency has said that will decrease its bureaucratic costs so more money can go directly to services for kids.

Stamas stood up in opposition to the thought, stating that although the agency promised to decrease costs, there was no guarantee that they would keep costs down in the future. The amendment failed, 16-19.

The Community Colleges bill (SB 1082), sponsored by Sen. Mickey **SWITALSKI** (D-Roseville), passed 36-2 with Patterson and Emerson voting no.

Sen. Mike **PRUSI** (D-Ishpeming) added a passage into the bill that it's the Legislature's intent to continue discussing how to best fund community colleges, including further discussion on millage funding for community colleges.

Other than that, nothing was done to SB 1082, which slightly altered the governor's suggested 2 percent across-the-board state funding increase to community colleges by injecting a new formula based on enrollment and the number of degrees handed out. When it's all said and done, Wayne County Community College gets an extra \$225,000 for swallowing up to \$450,000 in cuts in FY 2004.

Every other community college is getting between a 2.5 percent and 1.6 percent state funding increase under this bill. (See "Colleges Given Formula-Based Increases," 3/15/06).

The K-12 Appropriations bill (SB 1085), which is sponsored by Sen. Scott, passed unanimously, and without any major changes.

Switalski added a \$100 placeholder to guarantee the Legislature continue discussing the best way to fund education at the state and local level.

The budget calls for all schools receiving \$7,100 per student next fiscal year as opposed to the \$7,075 per student the governor suggested. In exchange, however, some of the governor's suggested programs aren't being funded (See "Senate One-ups Gov With \$7,100 Per Student," 3/16/06).

Granholt should sign SBT legislation into law

Jackson Citizen Patriot Letters

March 29, 20066

COLDWATER -- With recent legislative passage of an increase in the state's minimum wage, this increase should substantially reduce the demand for social-welfare assistance and the government employees and nonprofit organizations that deliver the services. It should also eliminate the need for any legislative initiative for welfare reform.

The last round of welfare reform at both the national and state level only produced a proliferation of nonprofit organizations delivering welfare services. The shift from federal and state bureaucracies to nonprofits in the delivery of social-service programs has not resulted in any savings to the taxpayers. This can be attributed to an increase in demand for welfare services available and the fact that nonprofits are not held to the same standard of accountability through financial disclosure.

Gov. Granholm, having signed the minimum-wage legislation into law, should not hesitate in signing the elimination of the single business tax. The loss of tax revenue associated with the elimination of the SBT will not be missed because of the reduction in the demand for welfare services and its costs.

-- John Wilson